

that individuals with a disability receive the benefits and services of the program or activity.

(b) *Methods.* The Department may comply with the requirements of this section through such means as redesign of equipment, reassignment of services to accessible buildings, assignment of aides to beneficiaries, home visits, delivery of services at alternate accessible sites, alteration of existing facilities and construction of new facilities, use of accessible rolling stock, or any other methods that result in making its programs or activities readily accessible to and usable by individuals with a disability. The Department, in making alterations to existing buildings, shall meet accessibility requirements to the extent required by the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4151–4157), and any regulations implementing it. In choosing among available methods for meeting the requirements of this section, the Department shall give priority to those methods that offer programs and activities to qualified individuals with a disability in the most integrated setting appropriate.

(c) *Time period for compliance.* The Department shall comply with the obligations established under this section not later than May 5, 2003, except that where structural changes in facilities are undertaken, such changes shall be made not later than March 6, 2006, but in any event as expeditiously as possible. If a component within the Department has already complied with the accessibility requirements of a regulation implementing section 504, then the provisions of this paragraph shall apply only to facilities for that agency's programs and activities that were not previously made readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities in compliance with that regulation.

(d) *Transition plan.* In the event that structural changes to facilities will be undertaken to achieve program accessibility, the Department shall develop not later than September 8, 2003, a transition plan setting forth the steps necessary to complete such changes. The Department shall provide an opportunity to interested persons, including individuals with disabilities or or-

ganizations representing individuals with disabilities, to participate in the development of the transition plan by submitting comments (both telephonic and written). A copy of the transition plan shall be made available for public inspection. If a component of the Department has already complied with the transition plan requirement of a regulation implementing section 504, then the requirements of this paragraph shall apply only to the agency's facilities for programs and activities that were not included in the previous transition plan. The plan shall at a minimum:

(1) Identify physical obstacles in the Department's facilities that limit the physical accessibility of its programs or activities to individuals with disabilities;

(2) Describe in detail the methods that will be used to make the facilities accessible;

(3) Specify the schedule for taking the steps necessary to achieve compliance with this section and, if the time period of the transition plan is longer than one year, identify steps that will be taken during each year of the transition period; and

(4) Indicate the official responsible for implementation of the plan.

§ 15.51 Program accessibility; new construction and alterations.

Each building or part of a building that is constructed or altered by, on behalf of, or for the use of the Department shall be designed, constructed, or altered so as to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with a disability. The definitions, requirements, and standards of the Architectural Barriers Act (42 U.S.C. 4151–4157), as established in 41 CFR 101–19.600 through 101–19.607 apply to buildings covered by this section.

§ 15.60 Communications.

(a) The Department shall take appropriate steps to effectively communicate with applicants, participants, personnel of other Federal entities, and members of the public.

(1) The Department shall furnish appropriate auxiliary aids where necessary to afford an individual with a